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INDICTMENTS RETURNED IN SHRIMPER'S "DEATH" HOAX MATTER

Lisa Godbey Wood, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia, announced today that a federal grand jury sitting in Savannah, Georgia has returned an indictment against **Kevin Klarell Washington**, age 32, and his wife, **Lavonnia Denise Washington**, age 29, on federal drug charges and charges related to his faked disappearance and death on September 13, 2005. Kevin Washington was reported missing on September 13, 2005 after reportedly falling off the shrimp boat *God's Mercy* in Ossabaw Sound. The United States Coast Guard engaged in intensive search and rescue operations in Ossabaw Sound after Washington's crewmate made an emergency 911 call from a cellular telephone aboard the boat. Washington was arrested in Orlando, Florida on June 20, 2006 following reports indicating that he was still alive.

The grand jury returned three separate indictments. In the first indictment Kevin Washington and Lavonnia Washington were each charged with conspiring to possess with intent to distribute and to distribute 50 grams or more of crack cocaine. The conspiracy is alleged to have occurred between October 1, 2004 and June 21, 2006. Kevin Washington was also charged

with five counts of distributing crack cocaine during the course of the conspiracy. In addition, Kevin Washington was charged with making a false distress call to the United States Coast Guard on September 13, 2005. In addition to the drug conspiracy charge, Lavonnia Washington was charged with concealing material facts concerning the investigation of her husband's disappearance and with making false declarations before the grand jury. She was arrested on June 21, 2006 and released on a \$200,000.00 bond set by the United States District Court in Savannah.

Indictments were also returned against two other individuals in connection with Washington's faked death and disappearance. **Timothy Bernard Sapp**, the brother of Lavonnia Washington, was a crew member aboard the *God's Mercy* on September 13, 2005 and is charged with making a false distress call to the United States Coast Guard. **Vernon Campbell**, who rendezvoused with the shrimp boat *God's Mercy* in a separate vessel on September 13, 2005 and returned Washington to shore, is charged with misprision of felony in that he failed to report the false distress call to the United States Coast Guard.

Wood emphasized that an indictment is only an accusation and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are entitled to a fair trial, during which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

The investigation is being conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration and the United States Coast Guard Investigative Service. The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Karl Knoche.

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